

WATERLOO CEDAR FALLS COURIER

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Vilsack launches Great Places program

By CHARLOTTE EBY, *Courier Des Moines Bureau*

DES MOINES --- Gov. Tom Vilsack unveiled details of his "Great Places" initiative Monday, a program that will help lowans create innovative and culturally vibrant communities and that he hopes will stop the exodus of Iowa's college graduates to other states.

His plan, which would have to gain legislative approval, would spend \$8 million in new money to help communities develop attractions or amenities that add to the quality of life for residents.

"Great places mean different things to different people," Vilsack said. "We all know great places in Iowa. We have a responsibility to preserve them, capitalize on them, learn from them, help them become even greater."

Local groups will be able to present an idea to a Great Places "coach" who will listen to their plan and put together a team of state agencies that can help connect them to state resources.

Community projects will have until July to apply for help through the Great Places project. A citizen advisory council appointed by Vilsack will select three pilot "Great Place" projects by October.

Iowa Department of Cultural Affairs Director Anita Walker said the program challenges lowans to "recognize, celebrate and capitalize on what is good and wonderful about Iowa."

"It could be a downtown main street with a story. It could be an urban center or a neighborhood. These are great places, or potentially great places," Walker said.

Vilsack said the Great Places plan continues the success of Vision Iowa, a program that brought new tourism and cultural attractions to 170 communities and led to \$2 billion in new investment.

"It has expanded dramatically the number of cultural and recreational opportunities in our state, and it has put us in a position to make a case to younger lowans to stay here," Vilsack said.

The state also has launched a marketing campaign touting Iowa's quality of life with billboards and newspaper ads that aim to attract new residents and retain those already living here.

Vilsack said he's received positive reaction from ads that were shown on the jumbo screen at the state high school basketball tournaments in Des Moines in recent weeks.

"People were very interested and excited to see that we were actually aggressively promoting the state, particularly to our young people," Vilsack said.

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